

RAJANI KANTA BARDOLOI

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunkonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

RAJANI KANTA BARDOLOI

Nirmalprabha Bardoloi



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The Background

The novel in Assamese as a literary form is relatively new. It developed in the wake of the western system of education introduced by the British Raj, and it drew its inspiration basically from English literature. The writers who seriously worked for the development of the genre in Assamese essentially belonged to that section of the intelligentsia who were exposed to western literature in the schools and colleges of Calcutta. They also came into contact with the cultural resurgence in Bengal. These two factors had generated in them an indomitable urge to cultivate their own language and literature with a new fervour. As a result, there flourished a humanistic and romantic literature signifying a break from the mediaeval religious literature on the one hand and started experimentations on new forms and literary genres on the other. The novel is one such genre that gradually replaced the 'kavya' or poetical narrative in Assamese literature.

The earliest contribution to the development of the Assamese novel has been credited to two members of the American Baptist Mission, namely Rev. N. Brown and Rev. O.T. Cutter. They were pioneers in Assam in the field of printing and publishing. Their missionary equipment included a printing machine—the first of its kind to arrive in Assam. Because of this printing machine, it became possible for them to bring out the *Orunodoi* (The sunrise), which is the first periodical in Assamese in the year 1846, evidently for the primary objective of spreading the message of Christ. It was in this periodical that an Assamese version of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* came to be serialized during 1850-51 under the title *Jatrikar Jatra*. This was the first novel to be translated into Assamese.

Kamini Kanta by G.S.Gurney, published in 1877, has often been regarded as the first Assamese novel, though it is likely that this is only an Assamese adaptation of a Bengali story written by a Baptist Missionary. Set in Calcutta, this novel shows how Kamini Kanta, son of Ram Jay Bandyopadhyaya of Gauripur, accepted Christianity and wrote a series of letters to his wife Sarala advocating the superiority of Christianity and finally succeeding in converting her into Christianity. With this simple plot, the novel could rise above the level of mere religious propaganda. The characterization of Sarala is interesting and provides us with a happy beginning of the Assamese novel *Elokeshi Beshyar Katha* (1877), depicting the conversion of a widow turned prostitute into Christianity. The chain of events shows both development and conflict, enriching the plot. In the same year, Mrs. Gurney published her novel *Phulmoni aru Karuna*, a translated version of a Bengali story of the same name. In 1880-81 she adapted it into Assamese, *Ruth aru Josephar Katha*.

All these stories with a leaning towards novel were written to propagate Christianity among the Assamese people. They were translations either from English or Bengali and their background was rural Bengal with its customs and traditions, beliefs and superstitions. The overall effort was to highlight the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism.

In the history of development of the Assamese novel, Hem Chandra Barua (1835-96) occupies a special place. His long personal writing *Bahire Rang Chang Bhitare Kowa Bhatari* (Beautiful to behold, hollow within) published in 1876 is more a loosely knit satirical story aimed at exposing the social and religious evils of the day than a novel in the strict sense of the term. The characters too are exaggerated types. However, the work can undoubtedly be acclaimed as the forerunner of the modern Assamese novel.

Another name deserves mention, that of Padmavati Devi Phukanani (1853-1927), the daughter of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, the man who fought for the introduction of the

Assamese language in the courts and high schools of Assam. Her *Sudharmar Upakhyān* (The tale of Sudharma) was published in 1884. The book did not have any propagandist outlook. Hence, it showed some improvement over earlier works. But, at the same time, this too could not rise to the level of novel. Divided into six chapters the story is concerned with the struggles of three pairs of lovers—Satyavan and Sudharma, Madhav Chandra and Lilawati, and Monohar and Monorama. The story begins with Satyavan and Sudharma going out on a journey with Madhav Chandra and Lilawati when the boat which carries them capsizes. Sudharma and Lilawati are rescued. They find shelter in an ashram where they meet Monorama who is being ill-treated by her husband. Eventually, the story ends happily when the three ladies are united with their husbands and Monohar, the bad husband, being transformed into a good man. The author undoubtedly has made a conscious attempt to develop a story.

Comparatively, the stories written to propagate Christianity appeared to be more realistic than the others described above. The reason could be that the Christian writers were better acquainted with the art of novel than the other writers. Hence, in spite of their propagandist tone, the stories could appeal to a wider readership.

The years that followed, brought about a new wave to the art of novel. The new wave was the result of a literary movement launched by the Assamese students studying English in different colleges of Calcutta. With their exposure to western literature, this new generation of writers sought to infuse a new creative spirit into Assamese literature. Their writings showed a conscious attempt to experiment with techniques. They began dealing with the ordinary lives of men and women with a spirit of romantic and patriotic ardour. From the technical standpoint, *Bhanumati* can be called the first Assamese novel. The story, set in mediaeval Assam, is purely a work of fiction.

The second novel of this period is *Padum Kunwari* (The lotus princess) by Lakshminath Bezbaruah (1864-1938). The

novel deals with the rebellion of 1795 by a group of people from lower Assam led by Haradutta and Biradutta Choudhury. The rebellion was aimed at overthrowing the Ahom authority in the lower part of Assam. This rebellion is known in Assam history as Danduwa Droh (The rise of the Danduwas). Bezbaruah could not do justice to the subject. The delineation of the mental states of various characters, the description of the milieu and the development of the plot are artificial and at times devoid of seriousness. The novel was serialized in *Jonaki* in 1891 and was brought out in book form only in 1905.

The third novel of the period is *Lahari* (1892) by Padmanath Gohain Baruah. The background is the chaotic social condition of Assam resulting from the Burmese invasion (1817-1825). However, the novel does not quite succeed in capturing the historical environment. The plot is complex in comparison with that of *Bhanumati*. The novel develops two parallel love stories—one of Kamala and Lahari and the other of Jayanti and Purna Gohain—with a thin link connecting the two. There is no inter-dependence in their development. The author could neither capture the historical setting nor the social setting which forms the backdrop of the novel. Such was the state of Assamese novels from 1850 to 1892. During these 42 years, only 10 novels came to be written. These can be classified into three categories : (i) Novels written to propagate Christianity (ii) novels written to reform the Assamese society and (iii) novels depicting family life.

The novels of the first category, written to propagate Christianity, were based on simple plots with plenty of discussions on religion and quotations from the *Bible*. All these novels ended with the hero's acceptance of Christianity and getting rid of the evils of Hinduism. Being sectarian, they lacked universal appeal. Obviously the target readers were the Hindus who would hardly appreciate the criticism of their own faith by members of foreign Missions. Moreover, the background of these novels being alien, their influence on the Assamese society was quite negligible.

The novels of the second category were written with the objective of social reform. The novelists were from Assam and they attempted to portray the local experiences. They were critical about Hindu beliefs and superstitions and not Hinduism as such. In other words, they did not undermine Hinduism. Moreover, being set in a familiar environment, the readers could identify themselves with the heroes and heroines. They could weep and smile with them. Finally, as the language of these novels was idiomatic Assamese, it was a marked departure from the artificial style of the Christian writers. This was another reason for the popularity of these novels among the Assamese-reading public.

The novels representing the third category are characterized by a leaning towards romance. They were essentially love stories in some form or other of people mostly belonging to the higher strata of society. For instance *Bhanumati* is the story of a romance between the daughter of an Ahom official and the son of another official. Another novel of this type is *Padum Kuvnwari*. The heroes of these novels were bound by the customs and traditions of their society. Socio-historically it was quite natural as individuals were yet to attain that level of freedom that would enable them to defy social norms. Another feature of these novels was that the heroines played a more active role than the heroes.

It should be noted here that before Rajani Kanta Bardoloi appeared on the scene, there was hardly any novelist worth the name in the Assamese. Few attempts made by different writers were of a preliminary nature. They had yet to master the craft of fiction. Their writings could hardly satisfy the demands of the readers. Bardoloi was aware of this vacuum when he stepped into the Assamese literary scene.

Life and Career

Rajani Kanta Bardoloi, who deserves to be called the father of Assamese novel, belonged to a family the ancestry of which goes back to the days of Ahom kings. His grandfather, Tuaram Deva Sarma, hailed from Rongpur, which currently goes by the name of Sibsagar in upper Assam. He served the Ahom court as a royal astrologer and in recognition of his services, he was conferred the title of Dihingia Doloi.

The Burmese invasion (1819-1824) which had let loose a reign of large-scale horror and bloodshed, changed the course of history of Assam, and along with it, the course of life of Tuaram Deva Sarma as well. Like many other Assamese families fleeing away from their homes to escape the repression of the invaders, Tuaram Deva Sarma took refuge in a remote corner of Bengal—at Santipur, in the district of Nadia. This shift, however, proved to be a blessing in disguise for him : for in course of the twelve-year sojourn, he studied various courses of philosophy, rhetoric, poetics, *srutis* and *smritis* in Sanskrit. When he returned to Assam, he was no longer his earlier self, but a scholar, well-versed in the scriptures.

On his return from Bengal, Tuaram settled at Bang Bajali in the district of Kamrup. Then he got married and subsequently became the father of a son called Hara Kanta. Later on, Tuaram shifted from Bajali to the village Bansi, near Hajo, in the district of Kamrup.

The year 1828 was a turning point in the history of Assam. It was the year of the signing of the treaty of Yandaboo by the Burmese invaders with the British by which the former gave up all claims of conquest over Assam. Then followed a period of consolidation of the British rule during which Assam experi-

enced a series of changes in her legal and administrative set up.

It was during these early years of the British rule that Nara Kanta Bardoloi came over to Guwahati and settled at the site where the present Cotton Hindu Hostel stands. Thereafter, he moved to the locality of Guwahati, which was then known as Kukurmata and later re-named Hedayatpur. He joined the Commissioner's office as a surveyor, with a monthly salary of ten rupees only.

Rajani Kanta Bardoloi was born on November 24, 1867, at Hedayatpur in Guwahati. He had two brothers, Siva Kanta and Rohini Kanta. In 1876, Rajani Kanta lost his father. He was then nine years old.

Rajani Kanta began his learning at the feet of the priest Sasadhar Deva Sarma. In *Atma Jiban Carit*, his autobiography, he has vividly described the day he was initiated into the mysteries of learning. Bardoloi was tutored by his guru for a year. Bardoloi showed the presence of a keen and alert mind. Indeed, so pleased was the *guru* with his pupil that he predicted that in due course his pupil would be a very learned man.

In those days the Bengali language was the medium of instruction in Assam. Being a man with a rural background, his guru was not adept in teaching the Bengali language. Bardoloi recorded an amusing anecdote concerning his experience of learning Bengali under his guru.

Bardoloi recalled reading the following Bengali sentence:

Beni bara duranta balak. khir koi, mithai koi balia make marte jay. tomar batite pahuchiya dichchhi.

Rendered into English, the sentences would read :

Beni is a wicked boy. He goes to beat his mother demanding : 'Where is my milk?' and 'Where is my sweetmeat?' I shall escort you to your home.

Bardoloi's guru rendered it into Assamese as follows :

tar mak baliya, pagala achil. sei dekhi Benio duranta achil. kintu baliya make tak mariboloi khedi khedi giochil. tomar tarkarir batit moi pahubilak bachi bachi deo.

The English rendering of the guru's version would be :

Beni's mother was a mad woman. So he was also a wicked boy. But his mad mother would chase him and beat him. I shall serve you after select pieces of venison on your plate.

The amusing anecdote cited above provides us with a glimpse of the sad state of affairs in which the Assamese teacher and pupil found themselves in because of the anomalous language policy followed by the British rulers. Be that as it may, subsequently Bardoloi joined the Guwahati Government High School in class one. We know very little about his school life apart from the fact that he passed the Entrance examination in 1885 in the second division and was awarded the Elias scholarship.

This scholarship encouraged Bardoloi to pursue higher studies in Calcutta. He joined the Metropolitan College there and, two years later, in 1887, he passed the F.A. examination in the first division securing the seventh or eighth rank in order of merit.

In the same year, he was enrolled in the City College and the Medical College and found accommodation in 67 Mirjapur Street. One day Hem Chandra Goswami met him and informed him about *Jonaki*, the first monthly magazine in Assamese published by Chandra Kumar Agarwalla. Incidentally, *Jonaki* became the centre of literary activities of a band of devoted Assamese literary pioneers. Led by Lakshminath Bezbaruah, they ushered in the regeneration of Assamese literature and culture. The historic role played by this magazine proved to be so fruitful and influential that the first period of romantic, humanistic and nationalistic upsurge in Assam has been termed as the *Jonaki* age in modern Assamese literature.

At Hem Chandra Goswami's request Bardoloi wrote an article in *Jonaki* entitled 'Sarir Tatwa' (On physiology). It must

be recorded that this article marked the beginning of his literary career.

In the year 1889, he graduated in Arts from Calcutta University. Though he studied law for a year, he could not complete the course and in the early part of 1890, he returned to Guwahati, the nerve-centre of Assam. On April 8, 1890, he joined the office of the Deputy Commissioner as the fourth clerk. With the beginning of census work, he served as census clerk, subsequently becoming the chief superintendent of the Rani district. He became Branch Assistant under Girish Babu of the census office headed by Mr Edward Gait, the famous historian.

In 1892, he was promoted to the post of Sub-Deputy Collector in North Lakhimpur.

In 1894, he was transferred to Barpeta. During his stay at Barpeta, he travelled extensively with a view to collecting information on places of historical importance. On one such occasion, he came across a man named Raghubir Das who had established a temple known as Narasingh Bari at Goalpara. Raghubir Das used to visit Naga Babaji of Barpeta where Bardoloi had a debate with Das about Hinduism. The arguments of Das were so convincing that Bardoloi was compelled to give up his western philosophical outlook and the views held by the Brahmo Samaj and adopted the Vaishnavite religious faith. He became a devotee of Lord Krishna and began to study the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata*, the *Kirton*, the *Dasam* and the *Bargeets* of Sankardeva. He also had discussions on religious matters with Santiram Barhiha Atai of Barpeta Satra. Thus, Barpeta proved to be the place of religious rebirth of Bardoloi.

Assam was rocked by a severe earthquake on April 13, 1897. Soon after, Bardoloi was transferred to Guwahati. The period from 1897 to 1903 kept him moving from one place to another. During this period, he was also busy in preparing himself for a departmental examination as he had been promoted to the rank of Extra Assistant Commissioner.

In 1903, he was transferred to Golaghat in the settlement department. It was here that he had an opportunity to observe

some Yogic feats by one Paramahansa. Bardoloi found the field of magic, spell and hypnotism very interesting. He also studied books on *Siva Samhita* and *Gheranda Samhita*. All these studies led him to write his own book on the subject.

In 1907, Bardoloi suffered a personal bereavement : his second son, aged only 10 years, died. Three years later, in 1910, he lost his eldest son Golok Kanta who died of typhoid on his way from Calcutta where he had just finished his M.A. examination. These tragic events left a disturbing effect on his mental life.

Even in the midst of his gloom, he had not stopped writing. At the request of Mr Sudmerson, Principal of Cotton College, Guwahati, Bardoloi prepared a note on the Assamese language together with a list of old and modern books in Assamese. He also wrote an article dealing with the Assamese people living in Tarapur and other places in the district of Cachar.

Following his transfer to Nowgong in 1909, he had to prepare a note on the 'Chutias of Assam' at the request of Col. Gurdon.

Two months after the death of his eldest son, he was transferred to Dhubri in the district of Goalpara. In 1912, he paid a visit to the sea-side resort of Puri. The experiences which he had gathered during this journey formed the subject of an article. In the year 1915, Bardoloi was again transferred to Dibrugarh. In January, 1918, he retired from service.

Following his retirement from service, Rajani Kanta Bardoloi bought the Hebeda Tea Estate at Dibrugarh. Thereafter he devoted himself solely to literary pursuits. In 1920 he chaired the annual session of the Asom Sahitya Sabha at Nowgong.

He edited a monthly magazine, *Pradipika* (A lamp), for two years with financial assistance from Naradev Goswami of the Dakshin Pat Satra of Majuli.

Literary Achievements

With the annexation of Assam to the British Empire, the British Administrators set up their own administrative machinery in the state. They began running the administration in Assamese. But being strangers to the land and having no knowledge of the local tongue, they had to bring people from the neighbouring states to act as interpreters and within ten years of their rule, the official medium was switched over from Assamese to Bengali in the year 1836.

Since then, the Assamese people had been demanding the reinstatement of the Assamese language in its proper place. The British rulers ignored their demand on the plea that the Assamese language to them was nothing but a patois of the Bengali language. However, the American Baptist Missionaries, who came to preach Christianity in Assam in 1836, realized that Assamese was a distinct language with a unique literary heritage that could compare favourably with any other regional language of India. But the difficulty was that the existing literary works were in manuscript form and Assam was yet to have a printing press. Hence, there was no other alternative but to introduce Bengali in schools of Assam.

Inspired by the study of English and Bengali literatures, the Assamese students who were studying in Calcutta formed, in 1888, an association which they called Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha (Association for the improvement of the Assamese language). The aims of the association included improving and enriching the Assamese language and literature. The Association brought out its magazine named *Jonaki* (The firefly) in 1889 which was to be its mouthpiece and every Assamese student was called upon to contribute writings to this magazine.

During that time Rajani Kanta Bardoloi was a degree student of the City College. He contributed an article which incidentally happened to be his maiden venture in writing and the beginning of a very fruitful literary career. When he went back to Assam a year later in 1890, he carried with him an earnest literary zeal.

On the eve of his departure to Assam, he met Ramesh Chandra Barkakati and expressed his desire to write a series of novels like Sir Walter Scott and Bankimchandra Chatterjee. Barkakati suggested him to be cautious so as not to mislead the Assamese youths with love stories devoid of any noble significance. To this Bardoloi replied that he would write love stories with the aim of ennobling the mind of the Assamese youth, and not denigrating it.

Back in Assam, in collaboration with Kanaklal Barua and Gopal Krishna De, he wrote a play named *Savitri-Satyavan* in 1890. Then, in 1892, there followed two essays 'Raktahari padapa' (Blood-sucking plants) published in *Jonaki* and 'Catan prani aru udbhidar parthakya ki' (On the distinction between a living being and a plant), published in *Sahitya Sangraha*, a collection of literary pieces.

In 1894, at the request of Sir Edward Gait, he wrote an article captioned 'The religion of the Miris', which was the basis of his famous novel *Miri Jiyori* (The Miri damsel) written later in the same year. This is the first novel in Assamese based on a community of Assam. He wrote this novel in course of a two-day journey by boat.

In 1896, Bardoloi wrote two monographs, 'Potteries in Assam' and 'The weaving industry in Assam'. During that period, from April to June 1897, he wrote *Jnan Sopan* (Steps to knowledge) which was prescribed as a textbook for the lower Primary School Leaving Course in Assam. This was followed by his famous historical novel *Monomati* and a paper on the fisheries of Assam in 1900.

His book on Yogic philosophy entitled *Monovijnan* appeared in 1903. This was followed by a series of articles, namely.

'Notes on the Assamese language', 'The Chutias of Assam', 'Manipuri jati' and a historical novel *Danduwa Droh*. His article on the dresses of the Assamese people 'Assamiyar sajjar' appeared in 1910 and four years later, in 1914, appeared his travelogue entitled *Puri Bhraman*.

His writings during the 1920s included a study of the founder of the Brahma Samhati sub-sect of the Assamese Vaishnavas entitled *Sankardev aru Hindu dharma* (1920), a report on a visit to Sitakunda of the Jaypur mouza of Dibrugarh entitled 'Dibrugarh ancalar Jayapur mouza of darshan' in *Banhi* (1923) and a treatise on the antiques of the Sadiya Kingdom entitled 'Sadiya rajyar purani tattva', again in *Banhi* (1923).

1925 was the most fruitful year in Bardoloi's literary career. In this year there appeared three of his novels *Radha Rukminir Ron*, *Rangil* and *Nirmal Bhakat*. Besides, in that year, he was elected President of the Asom Sahitya Sabha in the Nagaon session. His presidential address revealed a well-informed mind. In the same year, he chaired the Chutiya Sammelan at Golaghat and also edited a monthly magazine named *Asam Pradipika* (The light of Assam) funded by the Satradhikar of Dekshinpat Satra of Majuli, Sri Narodev Goswami. The magazine continued for two years upto 1926. It was in this magazine that he serialized *Tamreswari Mandir*, a treatise on the temple of Tamreswari.

In 1926, he presented a paper entitled 'Mahapurush Sri Sri Sankardev' in a public function on the occasion of the death anniversary of Sankardev. He also presented a paper in the second conference of the Miris named 'Miri sammelantar dvitiya adhivasanar baktrita' and another at the Kachari Conference entitled 'Dangari Kachari sammelantar baktrita' in that year. The next year, his essay on a social problem 'Gadhan' (Birde's money) was published in *Awahan*.

The year 1930 saw the publication of his novel *Rohdoi Ligiri* followed by an article named 'Satyanusandhan' about James Watt, the discoverer of the steam engine in *Bordoicilla*, a literary miscellany. His 'Naradev tithir upalaksha

diya baktrita', a talk on the occasion of the death anniversary of His Holiness Naradev Goswami, his lectures on 'Postal Union' and an article entitled 'Asamiya pranar spandan' were published during this year. The last one appeared in *Bahi*.

In 1931, he wrote a treatise on the Mayamaria Satras entitled 'Mayamoria satrasakalar bisaya' and another article on the same subject entitled 'About the Mayamorias'. His tale of Khamba and Thoibi entitled *Khamba-Thoibir sadhukatha*, a love story of a Manipuri youth named Khamba and a Manipuri maiden named Thoibi, appeared in 1932. On the same year there appeared in *Awahan* an article of his entitled 'Asamat upanyasar sajuli' exploring the materials (Sajuli) available in Assam for novels. His other articles published in that year include 'Sanskrit sikshar bisaye' (On the teaching of Sanskrit) in an Asamiya weekly from Dibrugarh and 'Bhadra chauyar bisaye' (On the gentleman thief).

In 1934, Bardoloi wrote the story of his past literary career in an article entitled 'Mor sahitayik jivanar atit kahini' published in *Awahan* and an article for *Borboicilla* entitled 'Bordoicilaloi'. He also wrote five humorous prose pieces under the pen name of Bholai Sarma for different magazines which he collected and published in the form of a book in 1935. In 1937, he prepared the outlines of a biographical sketch of Bhattadev, the first Assamese prose writer of the 16th century, and published in *Awahan*.

His writings in 1939 included two short stories 'Premar upasak' (The worshipper of love) and 'Sundarar upasak' (The worshipper of beauty) published in *Bahi* and a reminiscence of his association with Lakshminath Bezbaruah entitled 'Bezbaruah sowarani' published in *Bahi*. He also wrote an introductory essay on the novels of Saratchandra Chatterjee entitled 'Sarat Chattopadhyar upanyaswali' and a review of Kamala Kanta Bhattacharyya's poems entitled 'Chinta toranga', both of which appeared in *Bahi*. The following year he published two autobiographical essays 'Atmajivan charit' and 'Mor jivanar avijnata' in *Bahi*.

In all, Bardoloi wrote nine novels, three short stories and co-authored a play. His other writings include a humorous book, a text-book, an essay on physiology, two on botanical subjects, four notes on the tribes of Assam, two on the cottage industries of Assam, a note on the pisciculture in Assam, four travelogues and a book on Yogic psychology. In addition, he wrote a note on the Assamese language, a treatise on Assam's antiques, articles on the teaching of Sanskrit, the art of writing novels, four autobiographical sketches, besides book reviews. His other writings include essays on literature and religion, and editing a literary-cum-religious periodical for about two years. One can see a wide range and variety in his writings.

The Novels

Bardoloi wrote nine novels, namely : *Miri Jiyori* (1895), *Monomati* (1900), *Dandua Droh* (1909), *Rangili* (1925), *Radha Rukminir Ran* (1925), *Nirmal Bhakat* (1925), *Tanreswari Mandir* (1926), *Rohdoi Ligiri* (1930) and *Khamba-Thoibir Sadhukatha* (1932).

MIRI JIYORI

There was, on the bank of the river Subansiri in the district of North Lakhimpur in Assam, a Miri village where lived Tamed and Nirvana with their only daughter Panei. Amidst the pastoral surroundings of the village, Panei shared her childhood songs and dances, her fun and frolic with a boy named Janki of the neighbourhood. Obviously, one gradually began to develop a tenderness for the other. But when the boy proposed to marry her, she insisted upon her parents' consent in the matter. Being genuinely in love, they secretly took a vow before their tribal deity Karsing-Kartang never to part with each other.

Panei's father Tamed, however, had selected another young man named Kumud for her. What was more, he even allowed the young man, as customs demanded, to stay in their house for some time, after which they could be married. Panei had no other alternative but to run away with Janki. However, her father engaged a few villagers to seek her out from the jungle and brought her back. She was put under the charge of her father while the unfortunate Janki was insulted and humiliated by the villagers. A case of kidnapping was filed against Janki in the lower court of North Lakhimpur. But the case was dismissed due to lack of evidence.

Tamed tried once more to arrange Panei's marriage with

Kumud. Once more, frustrating her father's designs, Panei ran away from home. This time Janki was not in league with Panei, and so he had no idea of the incident. But Tamed and Nirvana suspected Janki, and charged him of kidnapping Panei. Eventually the parents declared that they would have no objection to Panei's marriage to Janki if the latter could find her out.

Janki set out to look for his beloved Panei. But he was caught by some Gachi Miris and taken prisoner. Incidentally, Janki found that Panei was also a prisoner by another group of Gachi Miris.

Panei and Janki saw each other but were not allowed to exchange words. One night Janki managed to meet Panei and made a plan to escape. Unfortunately, they were caught in their attempt to escape and faced a trial. They were tied together chest to chest and were killed by piercing spikes. Their dead bodies were then thrown into the Subansiri river. Their bodies were eventually found by Panei's parents who repented their blunder.

It is indeed a touching story of a pair of lovers that Bardoloi weaves out, revealing at the same time, a close acquaintance with the Miris and their way of life, their customs and traditions, their religious beliefs and their superstitions. The novelist's romantic imagination must have been aroused by the unsophisticated, comparatively simple way of life of the Miris and their closeness to nature. With the Subansiri river as the background and also as an inseparable part of their lives, Bardoloi has drawn an idyllic picture of the lives of the Miris.

Structurally, the novel is very simple : a Miri young man and a Miri young woman find their childhood intimacy grow into love. But an element of conflict is introduced in the romance when the young woman's father decides to give her in marriage to a rich young man. The romance ends tragically when the hero and heroine are put to death in a very cruel manner.

Descriptions and dialogues rather than actions form the main prop of the novel. The number of characters is limited. Be-

tween the lover and his beloved, it is the lover who plays a more active role than the other. The heroine, Panei, also impresses us by her calm patience and sense of duty.

In the novel, Bardoloi also uses dreams to signify the future. Sometimes he devotes too much space to descriptions of religious rites while at times he comes out openly with his own comments. Barring such weaknesses, Bardoloi's *Miri Jiyori* (The Miri damsel) undoubtedly be acclaimed as a tragic romance and an idyllic social novel.

With his didactic and religious attitude as a novelist, Bardoloi reveals his sympathy for the concept of love-marriage and indirectly warns the parents not to stand in the way of such union. The greed for money which impelled the heroine's father to oppose her marriage to the person she loves, has also been denounced in the novel.

Undoubtedly *Miri Jiyori* will always occupy a unique place in the history of the Assamese novel. Among his nine novels only *Miri Jiyori* and *Khamba-Thoibir Sadhukatha* belong to the category of the social novel. While the former is based on the way of life of the Miri tribes of Assam, the latter relates to the way of life of the Manipuri tribe.

MONOMATI

Monomati has been acclaimed to be Bardoloi's best work. Placed against the background of the last few years of Ahom rule, which were marked by the horror and bloodshed of the Burmese invasion of Assam, and consequent instability and unrest, the novel is concerned with the love-story of Lakshmikanta and Monomati.

Monomati was the adopted daughter of Chandi Barua of Barnagar, Kamrup. During the Dolyatra festival, while going to the Kirtanghar at Barpeta, she felt attracted by Lakshmikanta, son of Halakanta Barua. At the very first sight, they fell in love with each other.

Incidentally, Chandi Barua and Halakanta Barua were on

hostile terms with each other. Now, Monomati had a friend named Pamila. Pamila, by utilizing the services of Santiram, an elderly Vashnavite, had arranged a meeting between Monomati and Lakshmikanta in their flower garden.

On that very day, the Burmese who were ravaging Assam during these unfortunate days, attacked the settlement of Chandi Barua and made Lakshmikanta, Monomati, Pamila, Santiram and others their captives. .

Halakanta, on the other hand, wanted to avenge himself on Chandi Barua. He joined hands with the Burmese invaders in committing numerous crimes against the Assamese people. In course of his plunder, he chanced upon his son Lakshmikanta, held captive by the Burmese. Unnerved, he approached the Burmese chief and requested him to release his son. His request being turned down, he revolted; but he was overpowered by the Burmese and was put into prison. He was repentant, but then, it was too late.

Mingimaha Tilowa, the Burmese chief, took an Assamese girl, Padumi, as his wife. Meanwhile, Pamila made a plan with Padumi, who had a soft corner for her fellow-countryme, to release Pamila, Monomati, Lakshmikanta, Halakanta and Santiram from the Burmese prison at Manibari village. At this critical juncture, the British army arrived at the scene and in the battle that followed, the Burmese were routed. The story comes to an end with the marriage of Lakshmikanta and Monomati.

About this novel, the author states : 'Being inspired by Sir Edward Gait, I investigated the location of Chandi Barua. The Burmese invasion and the death of Chandi Barua belong to history and the rest is imagination. The plot is woven round two incidents—the family feud and the Burmese invasion. But the two are not independent of each other. The family feud has been responsible for the attack on Chandi Barua by the Burmese who had been instigated by Halakanta to quench his thirst for revenge. The two characters in the novel who attract the reader are Pamila and Padumi. The latter herself a captive and

sufferer at the hands of the Burmese invaders, does her best to save her fellow countrymen from the clutches of the invaders. The former helps Monomati in being united with her lover Lakshmikanta. She takes care to save the house of Chandi Barua from the Burmese at the cost of her life. Thus, Padumi's character shines out brightly against the dark background of those oppressive days. It goes to the credit of the novelist that he had succeeded in presenting before us a vivid picture of the fearful days of the Burmese invasion.

DANDUA DROH

The novel centres round the revolt of the people of Kamrup against the Ahom rule. Provoked by the atrocities perpetrated by Badan Barphukan, the people of that region rose in revolt under the leadership of two brothers, Haradutta and Biradutta. The two brothers enlisted the co-operation of the Baruahs and Chaudhuries and got ready to give the Ahoms a fight. Badan Barphukan came to know this through secret intelligence service men. There followed frequent clashes between the rebels and the Barphukan's men and ultimately the rebels were victorious.

Meanwhile, to meet the mounting expenses of war, Haradutta began to raise revenue from the people at a very high rate, thereby losing the faith of the people and the support of the Baruahs and Chaudhuries. He made an assessment of his decreasing popularity and was for making peace. But his brother Biradutta would never agree to this. In the meantime Kalia Bhomorah came to Guwahati as the new Barphukan and made elaborate preparations for a show down with the rebels. The two parties clashed and Biradutta was killed. Haradutta fled with his family to the jungle but he was captured.

Based on this historical event, the author had woven the romantic love episode of Haradutta's daughter Padum Kumari and her lover Mahiram. This youth had lost his parents in his childhood. Haradutta had adopted him, and both Padum Kumari

and Mahiram grew up together in Haradutta's house. Over the years, there developed in them a deep love for each other. Padum's mother wished to give her daughter in marriage to Mahiram. Though at first Haradutta was very much against the idea of such a match, subsequently he too agreed. Padum and Mahiram were married. When Haradutta fled into the jungle after his defeat in the hands of the Ahom soldiers, Mahiram was with him. After Haradutta's death, Mahiram fought with the Ahom soldiers and laid down his life. Thereafter Padum also ended her life jumping into the Brahmaputra.

The novel presents several pictures of the contemporary Assamese society. The different kinds of games and sports of the time, the Bihu dance, drummers and musical parties, and Ojhapalics performed at the Durga puja festival in Haradutta's house—all these are described with loving accuracy. There are also vivid descriptions of Padum's marriage. In addition, there are descriptions of the shrines, satras, temples and holy places of Kamrup and the old city of Guwahati. The author also describes the Ahom system of administration in several chapters of the book revealing thereby the typical picture of the Ahom times.

In terms of the treatment of subject-matter *Dandua Droh* can be more appropriately called a historical narrative rather than a novel proper. It seems that Bardoloi has acted more as a historian than a novelist. For his materials, he relied upon history and tradition. What we get here is an exhaustive description of the rebellion and an innate love of freedom of Haradutta and Biradatta in their attempt to free the people from the ruthless treatment by Badan Barphukan.

RANGILI

Like *Dandua Droh*, *Rangili* has the same dark historical background. The central character of the novel is the embodiment of an ideal woman. Satram, the bosom friend of king Chandra Kanta Singh (1811-1818, 1819-1821), was deeply in love with

Rangili, daughter of Narahari Senchowa. Because of his closeness with the king, who was known as 'Love Raja' or 'Boy King' for his tender age, there was a possibility of Satram receiving a high position. Anticipating this, Satram began to neglect Rangili though she continued loving him.

Chandra Kanta was made king by the Prime Minister Purnanda Burhagohain. But he did not allow the king to perform the coronation ceremony under the pretext of paucity of funds in the royal treasury.

The king took offence at this and Satram took advantage of the situation to please the king by humiliating the Burhagohain. Naturally, the Burhagohain was unhappy, but the young king was highly pleased with his friend's policies.

The Burhagohain, out of devotion for the king, wove a robe of 'kinkhap' silk with his own hands and presented it to the king for wearing it on the occasion of the Durga puja festival. But instead, the king asked Satram to wear it and to represent him in the festival. The nobility including the Burhagohain in the dim light mistook Satram for the king and bowed down before him. Soon afterwards the mistake was detected and Satram had to run away for his life. He was tried, found guilty of impersonation and was exiled to the Naga Hills.

In the trial of Satram, it was revealed that he had conspired to kill the Burhagohain Badan Barphukan. The Viceroy of lower Assam was a party to his conspiracy. Though the Barphukan was a relative of his by marriage, the Burhagohain decided to arrest him and try him on the charge of treason. When Fijan came to know of this, she wrote a letter to her brother Badan Borphukan advising him to arrange for his safe escape. She handed over the letter to Rangili who finding no one reliable enough to carry the letter secretly, finally contacted Satram, already exiled, to do the job. Informed in time, Badan Barphukan fled to Burma via Bengal and persuaded the Burmese king to help him restore the Ahom kingdom to his possession. Thereafter, the Burmese king sent a big army to attack the Burhagohain's army. In the battle fought at Namrup, Satram,

who had joined the Barphukan's army, fought bravely and embraced death. The Burhagohain died of illness and the disheartened army of the Burhagohain was defeated in the encounter. The Burmese invaders occupied the kingdom and appointed Badan to the post of Burhagohain and returned to Burma. In the battlefield at Namrup, Rangili worked as nurse to the wounded soldier and witnessed the death of Satram. Finally Rangili renounced the world and retired to Vrindavan to become a Vaishnavite nun there.

Bardoloi started writing this novel in 1910 when he was serving as Extra Assistant Commissioner there. It was kept aside till 1925 when he completed it and got it printed. He has tried in this novel to highlight the customs and traditions of Assam during the Ahom rule. Drawing heavily from the history of Assam, Bardoloi's attempt had been to draw people's attention to the atrocities committed by the Burmese invaders on the people of Assam. At the same time, he does not leave out descriptions of the then political condition and the social background.

Bardoloi adds a light touch of mysticism into the fabric of history. He presents an emotional drama involving the love-hate relationship of Satram and Rangili, Santiram and Padumi, Jayram and Keteki, and Manai and Bichitri. The novel, however, is chiefly devoted to the delineation of love between Satram and Rangili and between Santiram and Padumi. The rest forms subordinate episodes in the novel.

The novelist's method of developing these four episodes could not turn the plot into an organic whole. All the four episodes have remained separate and independent of each other. The novel, therefore, lacks in a well-knit plot. Occasionally the novelist introduces descriptions of Assamese customs and festivities. For example, in chapter VI, there is a description of the Rongili Bihu or the Assamese Spring festival. This description has no vital connection with the development of either the plot or the characters in the novel and adversely affects the structure

of the plot.

Bardoloi's characterization of Rangili is excellent. She stands out in dignity and beauty from the other characters of the novel. No wonder, the author entitled the novel in her name.

RADHA RUKMINIR RAN

The novel *Radha Rukminir Ran* (The battle of Radha and Rukmini) is based on the first Moamoria revolt in 1789. The novel was serialized in *Assam Hitaisi*, a fortnightly magazine in the issues 1-9 in the fourth year of its publication in 1928. At the end of the last instalment of the novel in the 9th issue, it was written that the novel would continue. As the magazine stopped further publication, it seems what we have is an incomplete novel.

King Rudra Singh had five sons. In order to prevent any possible quarrel among the five sons for ascending the throne, he made it a rule that all his sons would ascend the throne, one by one. Accordingly, after Siva, Pramatta ascended the throne. Following the death of Pramatta, it was Mohanmala's turn to ascend the throne. But his younger brother Rajeswar conspired with the minister Kirti Chandra Barbarua. On the plea that Mohanmala was pock-marked, the latter's claim on the throne was set aside and Rajeswar (1751-1769) was crowned. Mohanmala was exiled.

Because of the help offered by Kirti Chandra, Rajeswar was obliged to him. As a result, Kirti enjoyed immense power. When Rajeswar died, the three *dangories* (ministers) wanted to nominate the king's eldest son to the throne. But Kirti pleaded for Lakshmi and the ministers had to accept his proposal. This further added to the power and position of Kirti Chandra.

One day when the Adhikar of Moamoria satra bowed before the king, Kirti Chandra felt offended as he was ignored. Another day Kirti Chandra insulted the Adhikar. The infuriated Adhikar took a fresh vow to avenge himself on Kirti Chandra but since the officials could not be punished without changing

the king, he had to think of changing the king.

Two other persons, Nahar Khora and Raghav, had also been insulted by Kirti Chandra. These two went to the Adhikar and planned a revolt. The Adhikar deputed his younger brother Bengana Gosain and Ramakanta, the eldest son of Nahar Khora, to negotiate with Mohanmala, who was in exile. Mohanmala agreed to join the revolt on the condition that he would be made the next king.

Nahar Khora had two wives—Radha and Rukmini. A group of rebels proceeded to attack the royal army from the northern bank of the Brahmaputra with Rukmini leading them. The other group, led by Radha, went to fight from another side. In the battles that followed, the royal army was defeated and the king and Kirti Chandra, among others, were made captive.

Though Bengana Gosain was willing to make Mohanmala the king, his voice was unheard and the rebels made Ramakanta, the eldest son of Nahar Khora, the king of Assam. Mohanmala was thrown into prison.

Raghav became the Barbarua and Kirti Chandra was put to death.

Bardoloi has taken this account from the history of Assam. He has succeeded in highlighting the clash between the Ahom king and a group of rebels under the leadership of the Adhikar. The three aggrieved persons — the Adhikar, Raghav and Nahar Khora—were the master minds behind the rebellion. In translating the plan into action, the roles of Bengana Gosain, the younger brother of the Adhikar, Ramakanta, Radha and Rukmini are seen to be quite active ones. On the king's side, Kirti Chandra Barbarua is the main character, who has helped in developing the plot. The king Lakshmi Singh acts as a mere titular head with a very passive role.

The novelist is certainly successful in depicting the characters of Chaturbhuj, Raghav and Nahar Khora. The characters of the two Moamoria heroines are well depicted. Bardoloi's female characters possess special charm. The love, faithfulness and extraordinary courage that they demonstrate at the face of over-

whelming odds, make them admirable.

NIRMAL BHAKAT

The novel, written in the background of the second Burmese invasion of Assam, depicts the plight of a young man named Nirmal. As a young boy Nirmal used to play with Aniram and Rupahi. One day they thought of playing marriage with Rupahi as the bride. Trouble arose when both Nirmal and Aniram wanted to play the bridegroom. Rupahi advised them to play the bridegroom by turns.

When they grew up, Nirmal eloped with Rupahi. Meanwhile Nirmal had to join the army in the battle against the Burmese invaders and it so happened that he was captured and taken prisoner to Burma.

With the defeat of the Burmese in the war against the British, Nirmal, after long twelve years of captivity, was released. On arriving his homeland he was aggrieved at the sight of the Assamese villages. He could not even find out his own people who had fled their village in the wake of the Burmese invasion to various places. He could not even trace out Rupahi.

After some time he came to know that Rupahi had waited for him for long twelve years in a newly settled village. Aniram, too, lived in that village but had chosen to remain unmarried as he would not think of marrying any one but Rupahi. They had no idea that Nirmal was still alive. So the villagers persuaded Rupahi to marry Aniram, and Rupahi, on her part, who had suffered much for want of male support, agreed to marry him. Their marriage was duly solemnized and they started living happily together.

Nirmal received the news with great shock and grief. He decided to visit them in the guise of Kewaliya, a Vaishnavite renouncer of the world. He saw with his own eyes that they were happy and so he did not reveal his identity. He actually renounced the world and became a devotee of the Kewaliya

order under the Dakshinpat satra of Majuli.

After the death of Nirmal, everything was known to Rupahi and Aniram. They wept for him and constructed a prayer-house in his name.

About the plot for this novel, Bardoloi himself had said that the he had followed a story by Tennyson entitled 'Enock Arden' adding historical imagination to it. Though the setting of the novel belongs to the second Burmese invasion of 1819, no historical character has been introduced in the novel. The plot is woven round the intimate relationships of Rupahi, Nirmal and Aniram in 26 chapters out of which the first and the last three follow the epic form, and the others the autobiographical form.

It may, at this point, be interesting to explain the influence of Tennyson's story on Bardoloi. In Tennyson's story Enoch went out in a ship for trade and as a result of a shipwreck found himself in an uninhabited island where he had to live for years together. On his return, when Enoch saw his wife being married to Philip and were happy together, he was full of grief and died broken hearted. But in Bardoloi's novel, Nirmal follows the path of spiritual salvation by renouncing the world. Thus he attains a state of mental peace. Bardoloi's story is embellished with touches of local colour. There is a Bhaona performance. There are descriptions of Dakshinpat satra, discussions on religion etc. All these add local colour and beauty to the novel.

TAMRESWARI MANDIR

Historical in setting, Bardoloi's novel *Tamreswari Mandir* (The shrine of Goddess Tamreswari) tells the story of a passionate pair of lovers — Dhaneswar and Aghoni. Dhaneswar is a young man of the Chutiya family of Chunpora in North Lakhimpur, and Aghoni is the daughter of Langphai, the chief priest of the Tamreswari temple. Another young man, Maneswar, the son of

a priest named Satram, also loves Aghoni. But Aghoni's heart is with Dhaneswar. She loves his valour and manliness. But as they belong to two different castes between which inter-marriage is not socially approved, the marriage between Aghoni and Dhaneswar is disapproved. Besides, Aghoni's parents do like Dhaneswar.

Maneswar and Aghoni belong to the same caste and therefore, Maneswar's father negotiated with Aghoni's father about the marriage and a date is fixed for celebration of the marriage. The exchange of presents between the two families takes place to mark the settlement of the marriage.

Dhaneswar, however, is determined to marry Aghoni and in the presence of Maneswar, he kissed her. This leads to an altercation between the two. The next day, Dhaneswar meets Aghoni. She has been transplanting seedlings of paddy in the field, and he announces his decision to marry her. Aghoni feels happy, but she reminds him of her parents' opposition to their marriage.

Meanwhile, Aghoni's father, Maneswar's father and Maneswar lodge a complaint against Dhaneswar with the officer-in-charge of Sadiya called Sadiya Khowa Gohain for kissing Aghoni. The officer, however, does not find Dhaneswar guilty. Legal action being out of question, Dhaneswar's enemies now conspire to do away with him by any means. They approach a *tantrik*, who hails from outside, to help them in their design. The sanyasi agrees, and by some magic feats, he persuades the people that Dhaneswar should be sacrificed before the image of Tamreswari on the puja day. Meanwhile, Dhaneswar has become the devotee of a Vaishnavi on his way to Parasuram Kunda. As soon as the Vaishnavi learns about Dhaneswar being selected for sacrifice, she suspects some foul play. She advises Dhaneswar to be on his guard and personally approaches Phuleswari, the daughter of Sadiya Khowa Gohain. She also meets Kamaleswar Gohain, the man Phuleswari will be married to and informs them of the conspiracy and seeks their intervention for the safety of Dhaneswar.

Meanwhile, king Chandra Kanta Singh (1811-1818, 1819-1821) directs Kamaleswar Gohain to engage trained men to fight the Burmese invaders. Dhaneswar proves to be one of the best fighters. So instead of parting with Dhaneswar, he appoints him captain of his troops. The Vaishnavi exposes the tricks played by the *tantrik*, who is put to death by Kamaleswar Gohain. Later Dhaneswar marries Aghoni.

The novel is based on the third Burmese invasion of Assam. The description of the Tamreswari temple is derived from Dr. N. Brown's book entitled *Denrer Chutiya Grammar*. Before the British rule in Assam, the Chutiyas around Sadiya worshipped the goddess Tamreswari or Kesai Khati (The raw eater). The Duris were the priests of the Chutiyas and they conducted the ceremony. Each year, a young man with no blemishes on his body was offered to the goddess by way of sacrifice. When the Ahoms defeated the Chutiyas in 1522, they used to select victims from amongst the convicted persons. But it was not possible to find a convict each year. So a clan of *sad* (breeding bull) was raised and the victim was selected from this clan. Many privileges were allowed by the Ahom administration to the members of this cruel practice of human sacrifice.

The practice of human sacrifice at the altar of Goddess Tamreswari and the third Burmese invasion—these are the two events that provided the background of the novel. The former event is closely connected with the plot, while the latter has a very thin link with it. The religious discourses in the novel add to the volume of the book but do not help much in the development of the plot.

The theme of the novel revolves round the love between Dhaneswar and Aghoni. The other love-story between Kamaleswar and Phuleswari cannot be labelled as a sub-plot of the novel. Similarly, the event of the Burmese invasion has a very thin connection with the main plot of the novel.

Maneswar's character is rather weak. At the beginning of the novel, Maneswar plays the role of a rival aspirant for the hand of Aghoni. But in course of the events, he goes off the

stage letting Sangphai to do the job and, by the time we reach the last part of the novel, he has been reduced to a non-entity. In contrast, Dhaneswar's courage and strength stand out distinctly. Aghoni's character is also very nobly depicted. She does everything possible to rescue Dhaneswar even at the risk of her life. It was her initiative and drive alone that had turned the tragic story into a comedy. The Vaishnavi Krishnadasi is another character that dominates the second part of the story.

ROHDOI LIGIRI

Bardoloi's novel *Rohdoi Ligiri* (Rohdoi, the royal attendant) is set in the background of the first Burmese invasion of Assam in 1817. The central character of the novel, Rohdoi, is the daughter of Ratikanta of Kamalabari village, Majuli. She is in love with a young man named Dayaram. They would dance together at the Rangali Bihu festival.

Once Rohdoi has been to king Chandra Kanta Singh's palace to witness Durga puja. It is arranged between Rohdoi and Dayaram that as soon as Rohdoi returns from the puja *mandap* of the palace, they would get married. Rohdoi looks forward to their union. But it so happens that as the king sees her, he gets fascinated by her beauty and makes her a royal attendant against her will.

Dayaram is much pained when he comes to know about Rohdoi's appointment as royal attendant. He leaves his house for ever and remains untraced. Meanwhile, the king desires to make Rohdoi his queen. But Rohdoi opposes the proposal vehemently and so does the queen-mother. To outwit his mother, the king commissions Badan Barphukan to bring Rohdoi to Rangali camp where he will marry her and keep her as his junior queen. But meanwhile Badan Barphukan is murdered by Rup Singh at the orders of the queen-mother and the king has to leave the Rangali camp without being able to execute his plans fully. The king, however, leaves Rohdoi there with a number of maids attending upon her.

One night Rohdoi hears Dayaram singing a song and she

faints. Dayaram learns about her condition and goes to her in the guise of a *bez* (village quack). They recognize each other. An attendant called Bhanu reports this to the queen-mother. When she tells this to the king, he sets them free.

The queen-mother knows that sooner or later the king will marry Rohdoi at any cost. She confers with her brother, the Barbarua, to order Dayaram to go to the Naga Hills and make Rohdoi marry Rup Singh. Rohdoi crosses the Brahmaputra to avoid Rup Singh and reaches her house. But all her relatives and villagers do not welcome her for her stay with the king. Meanwhile Rohdoi's mother and younger brother die of cholera leaving her helpless. Thereafter Rohdoi meets Dhaniram, the father of Dayaram, and takes shelter in his house. When Rup Singh comes to know of this, he sends a *chaodang* (a policeman) to arrest Rohdoi. Outwitting the *chaodang*, she throws herself into the Brahmaputra. The next day Dayaram comes to his house. Receiving the news of Rohdoi's fate, he once again leaves his house.

Rohdoi is picked up in an unconscious state by Agamananda, a *tantric* sanyasi. He nurses her to life and initiates her into the *tantric* practices. She gains unearthly powers. By virtue of yoga, she transforms herself into an old woman and is renamed as Krishnadasi.

Rohdoi, in her new guise, helps the dethroned king Chandra Kanta Singh. She also demonstrates her yogic power before king Purandar Singh. Chandra Kanta becomes king for a second term and flees away to Guwahati to escape from the plundering Burmese aggressors. All the Adhikars of different satras with their attendants also camp at Guwahati. Krishnadasi alias Rohdoi meets Dayaram in the tent of Kamalabari satra and they recognize each other. They talk for a while and then take leave of each other for ever.

The speciality of the novelist is that the historical characters are not busy in political actions only, but they are also made to take direct part in the story. But this has not in any way affected their historical entities which remain intact. King

Chandra Kanta Singh, the queen-mother, Satram Purnananda Burhagohain, Badan Chandra Barphukan, Dhani Barbarua—all these historical characters, apart from playing their historical roles, get involved in the entanglement of love, which is the product of the novelist's imagination. In the second and third parts of the novel, the historical characters disappear from the stage, allowing Rohdoi, her spiritual preceptor Agamananda and his disciple Sravananda to play the major roles. The historical characters are now busy with their political activities only.

The last two parts are linked with the rest of the story only by the presence of Rohdoi. They deal with *tantric* rites, *hatha yoga*. Readers can raise their eyebrows at young Rohdoi's transformation into an old woman or about old Agamananda's transformation into a young man through *trantric* rites. But Bardoloi sincerely believed in those things. Further, his concept of human love, being sublimated to the level of divine love, has led him to depict the transformation of Rohdoi into an old woman and a devotee of Lord Krishna very successfully. Compared to the last two parts, the first part certainly is better and is one of the finest examples of Bardoloi's mastery over the craft of fiction.

KHAMBA-THOIBIR SADHUKATHA

Bardoloi's novel *Khamba-Thoibir Sadhukatha* (The tale of Khamba and Thoibi) is an adaptation of a Manipuri legend entitled 'Khamba-Thoibi-Givari'. The story takes us back to the past days when Manipur was divided into three principalities or kingdoms—Morang, Khuman and Lucany. In Morang, there reigned King Chenkhu Telheriba, who had no children. His younger brother had a daughter named Thoibi Laima. A descendant of the Khuman royal dynasty and an officer of the Morang king, Puranba had a son called Khamba. Khumnu, sister of Khamba, was Thoibi's friend. They lost their parents at an early age.

Khamba and Thoibi were deeply in love with each other and

they vowed to marry each other before their god Khjman Pokpa. The Prime Minister of Morang knew the lineage of Khamba and introduced him to the king, who appointed him as wrestler. One Kongyemba was the chief of the wrestlers and he did not like that somebody else should be the king's favourite. Besides, he, too, sought the hand of Thoibi. Once there broke out a quarrel between him and Khamba over the issue. When he attacked Khamba, the latter gave him a severe beating.

In the race held in honour of the Thonying, Khamba secured the first position. At another time, an untamed bullock created havoc among the people and the king promised to offer his niece Thoibi to anyone who could tame the bullock. Once again, it was Khamba who could tame the bullock. On another occasion, there was a shooting competition between the king and his brother. While the king engaged Kongyemba to bring back his arrow after it had hit the target, Khamba was engaged to bring back the arrow of the king's brother. As Khamba was returning with the arrow, Kongyemba snatched it away from Khamba's possession and presented the same to the king's brother. The latter was pleased at this and promised to give Thoibi in marriage to Kongyemba within five days.

Thoibi's father sent a message to both Khamba and Kongyemba inviting them to his house to marry Thoibi and set off to a hunting expedition. While proceeding towards Thoibi's house, Khamba and Kongyemba fell out with each other and the former overpowered the latter. But Kongyemba had other supporters who heat Khamba mercilessly. Meanwhile Thoibi's father returned from the hunt and saw the two men fighting. He was offended with Khamba and punished him by fastening him to a leg of his elephant and dragged him to his house.

On hearing the incident, the king was very annoyed and punished all those who were found guilty. He even ordered Thoibi's father not to give Thoibi in marriage to Kongyemba. Angered by the king's order, Thoibi's father sold off Thoibi to Hanjabai Tamrukpai, Chief of the Kub Nagas.

The god Thangring became sympathetic to Thoibi's suffer-

ings as a result of which he made her father sympathetic towards her. Her father sent men to bring Thoibi back and ordered Kongyemba to escort her half the way. Accordingly, Thoibi was to be brought back in a palanquin. But she insisted on riding a horse and on the way she left her escorts behind and galloped off towards Khamba's house.

The king had brought Khamba and Thoibi to the court. There came the news that a tiger was creating havoc in some area. The king ordered both Khamba and Kongyemba to kill the tiger and promised to allow the killer of the tiger to marry Thoibi. Kongyemba was injured by the tiger but Khamba succeeded in killing it. Thoibi was married to Khamba amidst great pomp.

One day Khamba wanted to test the faithfulness of his wife towards him. At midnight he left the house without her knowledge and teased her from outside. Thoibi, taking him to be a bad man, pushed a long dagger through the thin bamboo wall and killed Khamba. On the following day Thoibi jumped into her husband's funeral pyre and ended her life.

This tragic love story has a special appeal to the reader. While adapting this folk legend for his novel, Bardoloi thoroughly acquainted himself with the Manipuri beliefs, religious faiths, rituals and way of life.

II

The *Jonaki* age in Assamese literature flowered in the last decade of the 19th century followed by the Romantic age. The historical novel in Assamese was a special product of this age that articulated its fascination for Assam's glorious past. Rajani Kanta Bardoloi did the same thing in Assamese what Sir Walter Scott and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee did in their respective literatures.

Romantics are attracted to the light and shade of the distant past, to the simple life lived in the heart of nature and its

mysterious beauty. Their imagination can work more freely in such an atmosphere. Bardoloi too explored the remote past for his imaginative creations. His objectives may be as follows : (a) He wanted to present before the self-doubting people of his time instances of bravery that could rouse their patriotic feeling; (b) He tried to identify the reasons that led to the downfall of the freedom-loving Assamese people; (c) He drew a picture of Assamese society depicting its political, economic and cultural conditions immediately before the English annexation; (d) He tried to depict the perennial spring of simple life beneath the tumultuous surface. To these must be added another objective which Bardoloi himself has written : 'No matter how good the plot is, if it does not fit in with the national life, its customs, and manners, the novel can never be satisfactory.... Love for all living things, all men as the part of the supreme God and such other ideas, I believe, may be accommodated in a novel to light the path up for people.'

Bardoloi was not indifferent to socio-economic problems. With his unshaken faith in the glorious heritage, he created characters to fight injustice, exploitation and moral degeneration wherever he found them. All these bring out his sense of high idealism and deep patriotism. Nirmal Bhakat, Krishnadasi Vaishnavi and such characters represent such idealism on the part of the writer. In the closing chapter of *Nirmal Bhakat* the writer has given an interpretation of Vaishnavism. In the second and third chapters of *Rohdoi Ligiri* he has incorporated a description of *Natha-yoga* together with an interpretation of the essence of religion. In *Tamreswari Mandir* against the description of the worship of Tamar-Mai and subsequent human sacrifice, there has been placed the glorification of Lord Krishna and the superiority of the non-violent Vaishnava cult.

Bardoloi's novels quite faithfully project the Assamese culture. In *Rangili*, the Assamese Bihu festival and a special type of marriage typical to Assam have been depicted. His *Miri Jiyori* depicts the Nora Singa Bihu of Miching society and the religious worship held in the Morong huts. Similarly his

Tamreswari Mandir presents the worship of the Mother goddess while *Rohdoi Ligiri* dwells on yoga. In his *Monomati* he gives a graphic description of the Holi festival of Barpeta.

III

In his article entitled 'Materials for novel writing in Assamese' published in *Awahan*, Bardoloi observed that the cardinal part of a novel is love. Love leads to creation and fulfilment. The love which brings together the hero and the heroine in a novel is divine. Love as Rabindranath Tagore observed is a mirror in which the lover and his beloved rediscover themselves. Through love an individual achieves self-realization. In Bardoloi's novel we find a treatment of this love. Rohdoi, Rangili, Santiram and Nirmal Bhakat achieve self-realisation through supreme love.

Love, in Bardoloi's novels, begins in the physical level but culminates at higher levels. According to him, love is born of virtue. Hence in all his novels we find virtuous love. Love, the life-giving force of life, plays a dominant role almost in all his novels. He believed that when pure love is obstructed there is suffering for one or both of the loving pair. Frustration in love leads to moral degradation or even suicide. A few may convert their frustration in worldly love into love of God and renounce worldly life. The higher the level of treatment of love, the better the novel.

Votaries of realism of modern times have laid greater stress on psychological and sociological interpretation of love. But in mediaeval and romantic literature love is pure and simple. In Bardoloi's novels we find romantic love. Santi-Panei, Monomati-Lakshmikanta, Rohdoi-Dayaram, Padumi-Santiram, Nirmal-Rupahi, Dhaneswar-Aghoni—all these pairs burn in the sacred flame of romantic love. This love is pure, sincere, steadfast and reverential of higher values. The characters accept this love as a blessing from above.

The writer adopts some special devices to create complexity in the course of love. Either there is a rival or some political

or natural calamity or there is some long-standing feud between the families of the lovers. In *Rohdoi Ligiri* innumerable barriers are erected between the lovers, Rohdoi and Dayaram, by Chandra Kanta and also by historical happenings. Nirmal's world of happiness was blasted by the whirling of history. The love between Monomati and Lakshmikanta was obstructed by family feuds and political happenings. In the *Tanreswari Mandir* love between Aghoni and Dhaneswar was for sometime thwarted by clan disparity and a rival. In other novels also Bardoloi employs the same device to make the path of love uneven and difficult.

IV

In his novels, Bardoloi introduced supernatural characters and events, all from his own imagination, in order to make his stories arresting and idealistic. They do not form part of the historical truth as such.

His readers were more religious than the people of to-day. Religious faith in those days was a part of life. Some critics think that he introduced the supernatural element with the object of attracting credulous people. But his supernaturalism fitted well with the all-pervasive devotional appeal which the massive neo-Vaishnavite literature in Assam then exercised over the people. His later works were imbued with a religious and devotional attitude reflecting the writer's increasing faith in a divine dispensation. All his supernatural characters and events were invested with an occult power for the welfare of man.

For depicting supernatural events and characters Bardoloi employed the following devices : (a) Supernatural feats with the help of yoga-culture (b) Mesmerism or hypnotism (c) Divine grace (d) Dreams.

Yoga is an ancient practice in India. It is believed that with the help of yoga man can attain superhuman capabilities. It increases strength of body and mind, and opens the path for salvation. In the novel *Rohdoi Ligiri*, Rohdoi has attained trans-

formation of her body with the help of yoga in order to skip over grave physical dangers. On special occasions she assumes the body of an adolescent maid. By the same yoga Rohdoi converts the forty years old Swami Āgamananda to a youth of eighteen years. In *Nirmal Bhakat* when Nirmal breathes his last a heavenly chariot descends in the place. Bardoloi thrilled the readers of his time.

Bardoloi brought in hypnotism too. In *Tamreswari Mandir* a Bramachari Tantric sanyasi hypnotises a nine year old girl to succeed in a conspiracy. In *Rohdoi Ligiri* Swami Agamananda hypnotises Rohdoi.

In *Nirmal Bhakat*, Nirmal, in his sleep, sees Lord Krishna in His beautiful form before him. Waking up with a start, he sees, in the loneliness and dark of the night, a huge tiger sitting near and staring at him. Nirmal, who has surrendered himself to God, speaks to the tiger, 'Oh Lord, I have delivered myself to Thee. My body and mind now belong to you'. The tiger, a divine presence, comes out at the dead of night to test Nirmal's devotion to God.

Bardoloi's novels are replete with dreams. In fact these dreams are a kind of key to know the inner workings of his heroes and heroines. It is common in Bardoloi's novels to behold gods and goddesses in dreams. They appear to heroes and heroines in dreams and give them guidance as to what their next steps should be. From these dreams the readers can easily know how the characters stand disposed. In *Rohdoi Ligiri*, Rohdoi who, in her anxiety to evade the clutches of the king, takes shelter under the feet of Lord Krishna, sees a dream. In the dream a heavenly person appears before her and says : 'If you do not choose to be a queen, you will not be one. There is no cause for apprehension.' Again when Rohdoi is in Agamananda's hermitage to take initiation, her lover Dayaram appears before her in a dream and says, 'Dear Rohdoi, your decision to take initiation gladdens my heart. When we two cannot physically unite, what more can be hoped than that you offer yourself to Lord Krishna.' Both these dreams can be examined through psycho-

analysis. In both the dreams Rohdoi gets hints of her future course of action. In *Miri Jiyori*, Panei, while staying in the shelter of the hill Miris, dreams her childhood days. And waking from the dream she is struck dumb with joy to find Janki by her side. In the same novel, Panei's mother Nirmal sees in her dream both Panei and Janki walking hand in hand on the mountain-side, the night before the news of their death reaches her. In her dream Nirmal requests them to come down. But they tell her that they cannot climb down. In this dream there is more of psychology than supernaturalism, but two other dreams in the *Rohdoi Ligiri* and the *Tamreswari Mandir* are supra-natural. In one dream at the early hours before dawn Rohdoi hears a tune on flute. She grows wild with its sweetness, goes out, runs along the bank of the river, and at last goes to a hill where she clutches the feet of Lord Krishna. In the form of the Lord, she seems to have occasional glimpse of her earthly lover Dayaram. The Lord gives her blessings to be free from mortal ties in that very life. The novelist has given also a yogic interpretation of the dream concerning Lord Krishna. Be that as it may, the dream undoubtedly shows how Rohdoi gets a glimpse of a wider and eternal life even when she is in earthly life.

In the *Tamreswari Mandir* the two dreams seen by Dhaneswar and Langphai Deuri have gods in them. The deity of the Tamreswari temple appears before Dhaneswar in the form of an exquisitely beautiful damsel and advises him to take the name of Lord Krishna. In Langphai's dream also the presiding deity Tamreswari appears before him. Such appearances of the deity is a supernatural act. In *Nirmal Bhakat*, Nirmal's step-mother appears in a dream and assures him that the days of his sufferings will soon end. In a trice, the step-mother's shape transforms itself into that of the ten-handed goddess Durga. According to modern science dreams are a manifestation of the dormant consciousness of individuals. But Bardoloi harnessed them to describe supernatural events.

Conclusion

It has been said at the beginning that the creative force which marks the history of Assamese literature from the last decade of the nineteenth century to the first few decades of the twentieth century was largely due to the impact of western education and ideas partly due to the immediate contact with the neighbouring Bengali literature. These two influences not only helped the educated Assamese mind free itself from the bondage of mediaeval religious preoccupations and conventions, but also instilled in it the spirit of love of nature and common humanity and the dignity of the individual. The growth of nationalism was another major factor of the period leading the Assamese mind to revive its rich cultural heritage in poetry, drama and novel.

It is this romantic temper that has shaped Bardoloi's attitude towards life, his concept of love, his attitude towards nature and his love for Assam's history. Even in his historical novels the major characters are the common men and women. He depicts their lives passing through joys and sorrows of love. His concept of love is that of an idealist, constant and steadfast, whatever be the consequences. The heroes and the heroines are never disloyal to their counterparts.

Bardoloi's novels are the stories of common humanity. They are not the stories of kings or nobles. Panei, Rangili, Rupahi, Rohdoi and Aghoni are all common village girls. Similarly, Janki, Satram, Nirmal, Dayaram and Dhaneswar are common village youths. Radha and Rukmini too started as common village women, though later on they became elevated to the status of the queen-mother. Nahar Khora and Raghav were also common village cultivators. On the other hand, though female

characters like Monomati, Padmavati and Thoibi and male characters like Lakshmikanta, Haradatta, Biradatta, Khamba were not of the common status, their plight was not unlike that of the common people. All these confirm the novelist's fondness for depicting common life.

Bardoloi aimed at portraying the mediaeval life of Assam with all its colourfulness. But while keeping this aim in view, he did not neglect the characters, whom he had drawn with such immense care. An interesting point about Bardoloi's characterization is that in his novels women play a more dominant role than men.

Bardoloi has taken equal care in portraying both bad and good characters. With his deep insight into human nature, he has been able to infuse life into the characters that belong to history. It is also important to note that history is not merely the background of his novels. It affects the course of life of the main characters of the novels. Further, in his treatment of history, Bardoloi remains, by and large, faithful to history with minor alterations here and there.

A deeply religious man and a believer in yogic practices, Bardoloi's novels bear ample proof of his religious and yogic faith. His novels are also steeped in patriotic fervour and a deep love for the hills of Assam and the people who live there.

Rajani Kanta Bardoloi was one of the few pioneers of the Assamese literary renaissance who contributed substantially to the domain of Assamese fictional literature. He fulfilled his life's mission so amply that he justly deserves to be called the Walter Scott of Assam. His other writings, though considerable in volume, were merely by-products. One can safely assert, therefore, that Bardoloi's name will go down in the history of Assamese literature as the Father of the Assamese novel.

Appendix

Rohdoi Ligiri

CHAPTER V

At that time, on the western side of present-day Kokilamukh *ghat* at Jorhat, was situated, on a solitary high-land, an ascetic's *ashram*, resembling a sage's beautiful hermitage. In those days, today's Kokilamukh *ghat* was a dense and desolate jungle. Only the present-day Gohaingaon lay on its east and south. Even during the monsoon the high-land on which the *ashram* was, did not submerge. There was an open place all around. The land was covered with green grass, in between one or two *jhau* trees. In the *ashram*, there were five huts, neither very big nor small but of moderate sizes, made of straw. The hut in front faced north, towards the river. Towards the right of this house were two long huts, another lay on the left. In the middle was a courtyard towards the right of which lay a garden of about five *powas* of land. The garden was surrounded on all sides by an earthen wall. *Plaintain* trees lay near the earthen wall. The garden was a splendid one with flowers, vegetables as well as grass on which the cows used to graze. Its very sight filled the mind with a feeling of satisfaction and a sense of peace. At that time, no village existed near the *ashram* for nearly ten to twelve miles. The fact that such a beautiful *ashram* lay on the river bank was unknown to all except the Miri people of two Miri villages on the western side. There was no way to this *ashram* except through the river. The path which Babaji followed on the western side was narrow and there was the danger of tigers. To cross over to Aauaiati and other Satras there was only Raja Ali near Gangimukh and a *ghat* on the river bank. This *ghat*

was nearly fifteen miles eastward from the *ashram*. The *ashram* belonged to a saffron-clad ascetic with matted hair and a long grey beard that fell to his waist. He was a tall, strong, big and stout man. He seemed to be middle-aged by his looks. The ascetic was moderately dark-coloured. His eyes were very large and red. On his forehead was a vermilion mark. His name was Agamananda. He was an ascetic of the Birachari Tantrik sect. With him was his disciple named Srabananda. The Babaji had also an old Assamese servant to keep his garden neat and clean, to bring in wood and straw and then to graze and tie up the Babaji's two milching cows. The man had short matted hair.

Srabananda appeared to be thirty years of age. He was fair-complexioned. His hair was long and although flowing down his back, it was not matted. He too had on his body a saffron coloured loose dress falling down to his legs. Both the Babajis used to plant maize and *gabdhan* in and around the garden. Vegetables were also planted. The servant used to plant a little bit of red potatoes, white potatoes, gourds and so on. If the Babaji so desired the servant would cast off the net in the river and catch fish. If rice, wine, mutton were required, Agamananda would go alone to the Miri village through that small and narrow path. Legend has it that even tigers used to bow down and make way for him. When Miri people saw his appearance along with his two red eyes, they used to address him as *Deo Manush* and whenever he asked for things such as wine, liquor, ducks, pigeons, goats, rice, they used to give them to him. In a month, it was almost on all Sundays he used to go to the Miri village sometimes alone and sometimes, if necessary, with Srabananda.

Like any well-to-do Assamese man, Babaji used the front hut as a sitting-room. Miri villagers or boatmen coming by the river used to sit with Babaji in that sitting-room and converse. Sometimes, if night fell, then some boatmen spent the night there. In a room of the hut on the eastern side, there was an image of goddess Kali; the other room was used for cooking *bhog*. That *bhog* was almost always cooked by Srabananda; at

times Agamananda Baba used to cook too. At night if some boatmen stayed back in the *ashram* as guests then Babaji used to give them cooked *bhog*. The boatmen in turn would give Babaji a little of whatever things they carried in their boats. Babaji faced no difficulty in his food and clothing, rather he had an abundance of things.

No one could infer which place Babaji formerly belonged to. The Miri folk and the boatmen supposed him to be formerly a Hindustani and actually this was true. However, his disciple Srabananda was supposed to be a Bengali Brahmin. For what reasons he became a *sansyasi*, how he happened to become the disciple of Agamananda—no one knew.

It has been mentioned earlier that Swami Agamananda was a *Birachari Tantrik*.

If available he would drink wine and liquor, pot after pot. If he had ducks, pigeons or goats, he would himself or through Srabananda, sacrifice these before the goddess and then cook and eat them. He used to take fish as the Ganga's fruit. An amazing fact was that if he said 'no' to eating, then he could fast for ten to twelve days and if he wanted to eat, he could consume within a day one to six bottles of liquor and eat fish, meat, *roti*, *dal*, vegetables and rice upto five *seers*.

One morning in the month of Bhadra at about eight O'clock by the sun Swami Agamananda was going to the river for bath. He saw in the water of the river a human body floating. He looked intently for some time and saw the body moving its hands and feet a little. Going near he saw a *rihamekhala*-clad beautiful, young, grown-up woman. Placing his hand near the nostrils, Babaji felt that the woman was breathing. He exclaimed, 'Jai Ma Kali! Fulfill your child's wishes!' He called loudly for his disciple Srabananda. When he arrived Swamiji showed him the beautiful young woman, conferred with him and then both carried the body to the *ashram*. And there, in the southern four-roofed hut, they placed the body by the burning *dhuni* and increased the flame further. They, first of all, slowly removed from her body the wet clothes, one by one. Babaji placed a dry

saffron cloth on her body. He put some raw *ghee* on her nose and ears, and pressed the stomach slowly. Water came out from her mouth, nose and ears. By holding both her hands, he started moving them up and down. After some time, she started breathing properly. Babaji postponed his daily-bath and puja and started warming her body by holding out his palms to the *dhuni's* fire and pressing them on her body. At last she opened her eyes. When Babaji saw her trying to speak opening her eyes, he told her to keep quiet. She then again closed her eyes. Babaji heated some milk and put the warm milk little by little into her mouth through an *argheya*. A little later she cried out, 'Oh ! Ram' and looking at Babaji she asked in a very thin voice, 'Who are you? Where am I now?' Babaji replied, 'Mother, don't ask all these now. You are in my *ashram*. Now I shall go to take bath. You lie down for some more time. I shall finish my daily chores and come to you again. Warm yourself by the *dhuni*.

After having his bath, he returned to the *ashram*. He entered the hut where the goddess was and worshipped the idol and then entered the *bhog* hut. There he cooked vegetables along with *joha* rice and *moong dal*. He placed them before the goddess. After half an hour he placed a little bit of rice and vegetables on a *plaintain* leaf and took a bowl of milk and approached the woman to take them. Later he gave *prasad* to his disciple Srabananda and the servant and he himself took a fistful of it and drank a bowl of warm milk. Taking his midday meal, he entered the *dhuni* hut where the woman, after taking the *prasad* and milk, was resting a little. As Babaji entered she prostrated herself before the Babaji. He said 'Oh, Mother! What are you doing? You should not bow to me. I do not accept any woman's obeisance. If I do, then I commit a crime.' The woman replied, 'Baba, why should it be so? You are a *sannyasi*. Moreover, you saved me from death. I wanted to die and so I jumped into the water uttering Krishna's name and laying all blame on Him. But my life did not pass away. You are like my father. If I bow to you, it will be good for me.'

Babaji said, 'Mother, what you say may be true. But I am

a *tantrik*, Mother worshipper. I worship Goddess Devi. That is why, Mother, I behold all women in the world as mother-figures and bow to them. So when I saw you stuck on the river bed, I brought you here and served you. Will you tell me in detail what your name is, where you stay and how you happened to fall into the water.'

In response to Babaji's question, Rohdoi (Readers, you must be knowing that this woman is our Rohdoi, who had jumped into the water) said, 'Father, I am Rohdoi. My birth-place is Kamalabarigaon, on the opposite bank.' Thus she related to the Babaji everything from the beginning to the end shedding tears all the time. At last she said, 'Father, why I did not sink in the water, I do not know. I jumped from the other bank but I reached the opposite *ghat* near your *ashram*. I do not remember anything. I can say only this that as soon as I jumped into the water, I drowned to the bottom; but I did not stay long under the water as I know swimming. Either desire for life or swimming habit kept me floating although I was somewhat unconscious. I must had moved my limbs. I can tell you only this much as I had no consciousness towards the end.'

Translated by Manjari Sharma

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